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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019-03-03  
TAGS: PREL PTER AF MU  
SUBJECT: OMANI FOREIGN MINISTER'S VIEWS ON AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

REF: a) A) MUSCAT 154, b) B) STATE 18283, c) C) STATE 15959  
d) D) STATE 14097

CLASSIFIED BY: Gary A. Grappo, Ambassador, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy - Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Meeting with the Ambassador on February 28, Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi expressed support for the President's decision to withdraw combat troops from Iraq, but warned that a gradual increase in U.S. forces in Afghanistan would give the Taliban and Al Qaeda time to "adapt." Voicing doubts over the leadership of Afghan President Karzai, he also emphasized that the U.S. needed to vigorously address economic and social issues in Afghanistan and to win the support of Afghan tribes by directly engaging with individual tribal leaders. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During a February 28 discussion on reconstruction assistance for Gaza (ref A), the Ambassador informed Minister bin Alawi of ongoing U.S. policy reviews regarding Pakistan and Afghanistan (ref D) and the President's decision to withdraw U.S. combat troops from Iraq (ref B) while increasing U.S. forces in Afghanistan (ref C). The minister said the U.S. administration was "on the right track" in reviewing its Iraq policy and added that Oman was supportive of the President's decision to withdraw combat troops from Iraq. The "real problem," he stressed, was in Afghanistan. Bin Alawi warned that by "gradually" increasing the size of its forces to an "unmanageable" level, the U.S. risked repeating its failed strategy in Vietnam. Ratcheting up the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan in stages would give the Taliban and Al Qaeda elements "time to adapt," he explained. Accordingly, it was better for the U.S. to deploy all necessary troops quickly.

¶3. (C) Bin Alawi stressed that the U.S. needed to address economic and social issues in Afghanistan as vigorously as it addressed military and security matters. In this regard, it was "essential" for the U.S. to win the support of Afghan tribes and to convince individual tribal leaders to build a coalition to combat the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The minister also shared that he was "losing confidence" in President Karzai, claiming that the Afghan leader was unable to unite factional groups and had failed to clamp down on rampant corruption.

¶4. (C) Turning briefly to Pakistan, bin Alawi stressed the importance of securing the Afghan-Pakistani border, even if this required the use of U.S. troops. Using hyperbole to emphasize this point, the Omani foreign minister stated that the U.S. should work to "build a fence" along the troubled border and "mine it."

GRAPO

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